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REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION, PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22, PARAGRAPH 2(A) AND (B), AND ARTICLE 26 OF THE CONVENTION

REVIEW OF REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION BY NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES, INCLUDING ON THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMMES

SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES, AND PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

Note by the secretariat

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General introduction

1. In accordance with article 26, paragraph 1, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), "each Party shall communicate to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its ordinary sessions, through the Permanent Secretariat, reports on the measures which it has taken for the implementation of the Convention".

2. In its decision 11/COP.1 on procedures for the communication of information and review of implementation of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties (COP):

(a) Requests affected country Parties to provide a description of the strategies established pursuant to article 5 of the Convention and of any relevant information on their implementation;

(b) Requests affected country Parties implementing action programmes pursuant to articles 9 to 15 of the Convention to provide a detailed description of the programmes and their implementation, to keep reports as concise as possible in order to facilitate their review, and to structure reports according to the format and content laid down in the decision;

(c) Requests the Parties to submit their reports to the secretariat in one of the official languages of the Conference of the Parties at least six months prior to the session at which they are to be reviewed;

(d) Requests the secretariat to compile summaries of reports submitted and prepare, in addition, a synthesis of the reports setting out the trends emerging in the implementation of the Convention.

3. The UNCCD secretariat prepared, in collaboration with several United Nations agencies and subregional organizations, a Help Guide on the contents of decision 11/COP.1. The Help Guide was designed to provide a common format, practical recommendations and support for preparation of national reports (see ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3) by affected country Parties.

4. The first reporting exercise for Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties was conducted for review by the COP at its fourth session in December 2000, and by the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHGW), at its meeting in March/April 2001, in Bonn, Germany. The secretariat prepared a compilation and synthesis of the national reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties (ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(A) and Add.3(B)). The first synthesis report was based on five national reports received from Northern Mediterranean country Parties and five from Central and Eastern European country Parties.

5. At its fifth session in October 2001, the COP decided (decision 1/COP.5) to establish a committee for the review of the implementation of the Convention (CRIC), as a subsidiary body of the Convention, to assist Parties in regularly reviewing implementation. The review following this decision is to take place at the first session of the CRIC in November 2002. Country Parties were asked to submit their reports for this review by 30 April 2002.

6. The secretariat adapted the Help Guide for preparation of the first set of national reports in 2000, to bring it into line with decisions 1/COP.5, 3/COP.5 and 10/COP.5. The updated Help Guide was sent to the country Parties in December 2001. Country Parties were requested to base their national reports on the seven key thematic topics set out in paragraph 10 of decision 1/COP.5. They are reproduced in full in the subsection headings of section C (entitled "Synthesis of information contained in reports") of Chapters I and II of Part One of the present document.

7. The secretariat sent two letters of reminder to the concerned country Parties. In these letters, dated 30 November 2001 and 15 March 2002, it requested the countries to submit their reports to the secretariat by 30 April 2002.

8. As of 22 May 2002, 17 national reports had been received from affected country Parties (seven from Northern Mediterranean, eight from Central and Eastern European affected country Parties, one from a country Party covered by both regions and one other affected country Party). The secretariat prepared a synthesis and preliminary analysis of these reports, which includes reports submitted by 22 May 2002.

9. The present document is divided into two parts: Part One contains the synthesis and preliminary analysis of information contained in reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties. This part contains three chapters; the first contains the synthesis and preliminary analysis for Northern Mediterranean countries, the second for Central and Eastern European countries, and the third for others. The second part contains information on the progress made in the formulation and implementation of subregional and regional action programmes in Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties.

Part One

SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN, CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

I. SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Introduction

10. Eight national reports have been received from affected country Parties from the Northern Mediterranean. Three countries in the Northern Mediterranean (Albania, Cyprus and Malta) submitted reports for the first time. Five countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) submitted updates of their first reports, originally submitted in 2000. Apart from two, all the reports arrived after the deadline. The reports generally followed the recommendations on the drafting of reports.

11. A synthesis of the reports submitted is presented in the following sections. Reports submitted after 22 May were not taken into account for this review. The full reports may be consulted on the web site of the UNCCD secretariat, at http://www.unccd.int. The compilation of reports received can be consulted in ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.2.

B. Overview of reports and emerging trends

12. Compared with the first reporting process, three more affected country Parties have reported. Out of eight reporting countries, three have formally adopted their national action programmes (NAP) during the last two years. The other countries are progressing in the NAP process at various speeds, with some still in the early stages and others close to adoption.

13. Countries from the Northern Mediterranean present very different political, environmental and socioeconomic features: some countries declare themselves as being affected, others do not; several are developed countries (including members of the European Union (EU)). The main problems the affected country Parties of the Northern Mediterranean have in common appear to be soil erosion, salinization of soil and groundwater, and loss of quality of topsoil. The reported causes of desertification vary between countries (water shortage, drought, deforestation, littoralization, forest fires, flooding etc.).

14. General progress and efforts in awareness raising are reported (local workshops, media campaigns etc.), but without a detailed description of the results. At a local level these actions are appreciated and popular, resulting sometimes in an ongoing consultative process. Compared with the previous reporting exercise, the continuity of the involvement of local stakeholders, regional actors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in national coordinating bodies (NCBs), is also noted. It was also stressed that awareness raising requires immediate follow-up by political and administrative authorities. Otherwise, the result could be a loss of

interest by stakeholders in further involvement. To overcome such difficulties, some countries have adopted the European Awareness Scenario Workshop (EASW) method developed by the Information Society Directorate-General of the European Commission. It has proved a successful tool for remobilizing local actors in the UNCCD process.

15. Combating desertification needs an inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach, especially at the political and administrative level (ministries, NCBs etc.). Communication and cooperation between actors at these levels are reported as being difficult to develop.

16. At a legislative level, each country highlighted the ongoing adaptation of national laws and directives to the evolving NAP process (formulation and implementation). In addition, most countries have taken EU directives into account when preparing their NAPs. Regarding synergies with environmental conventions and linkages with other environmental and socioeconomic plans (local Agenda 21, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)), countries reported progress but it needed to be strengthened further.

17. Reports make clear the challenge of mobilizing domestic funding for combating desertification, in particular for NAP implementation. External funding also seems to be an important factor for non-EU countries in starting implementation of the UNCCD, owing to inadequate national resources and the other priorities set by governments.

18. Northern Mediterranean countries report positive cooperation between policy-makers, the scientific community and local stakeholders. This cooperation concerns decision-making and planning of concrete measures. Cooperation with other affected country Parties, the European Commission and United Nations organizations was highlighted.

19. All reports illustrate scientific activities, including projects, pilot areas, pictures and maps. They contain scientific details of causes and effects of desertification at local level. Most reports also mention the good involvement of the scientific community in NAP preparation and implementation. Networking among scientific institutions and the exchange of data at the national and European levels are being further developed, supported in some cases by the European Commission.

C. Synthesis of information contained in reports

1. *Participatory process involving civil society, non-governmental and community-based organizations*

20. Most reports highlight the importance of the activities of civil society, NGOs and community-based organizations in the participatory process. Depending on the progress made by the country in implementing the Convention, several different kinds of activities are undertaken: awareness-raising campaigns, workshops, round table meetings and project-related field work. Some of these activities were linked to the celebration of the World Day to

Combat Desertification, others to the development of consultative mechanisms at local level.

21. In order to ensure participation and obtain feedback, countries sent documentation on NAP preparation and/or implementation (basic information, outline or full NAP document) to civil society actors, NGOs and community-based organizations. Little information was given on the outcome of these activities. Three reports from countries which are preparing NAPs explicitly named actors involved, such as farmers' representatives, agricultural associations or environmental NGOs. One report mentions the use of a questionnaire to evaluate the needs of local actors for preparation of the NAP. Efforts to include women and young people in consultations relating to the NAP are noted by one country implementing its NAP, and by two countries preparing their NAPs.

22. Most of the countries which have established a NCB indicated that representatives of NGOs and the scientific community are already members of their NCB. One country states that its future NCB will be composed mainly of government representatives.

23. The importance of early incorporation of desertification topics into the programmes of schools and universities, in order to build capacities and raise awareness, is highlighted in some reports.

2. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

24. Out of the eight affected countries which have submitted their reports, three are implementing their NAPs. The other countries are progressing at various speeds with the preparation of their NAPs: starting stage (beginning of awareness-raising campaigns and research activities), medium stage (NCB set up, increased research activities, organized participation of main stakeholders, draft NAP) and finalization or near-adoption of the NAP. All countries provide information on the content of these various stages. The synthesis therefore reflects the differences which can be found in the status of implementation of the Convention in Northern Mediterranean countries.

25. Most reports provide information on already established NCBs, or their planned structure. In terms of their legal and administrative status, the NCBs are either a part of ministerial bodies or are fully decentralized, using existing local bodies for coordination purposes. However, all the reports indicate that the NCB is less a legal entity, and more a "coordination mechanism". Countries with decentralized administrative and political structures stress the need for developing or strengthening local committees to combat desertification. The role of the latter will be to ensure NAP implementation at the local level.

26. All the reports underline the inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary character of the NCBs. This creates difficulties in the communication processes between actors, the identification of priorities and the decision-making processes. Ministries of agriculture, the environment and forests are well represented on NCBs. In turn, the NCBs are able to benefit from ministries' legal standing to pursue their goals. Other ministries are also

represented on NCBs, such as ministries of planning, finance or foreign affairs. All countries implementing their NAPs indicate that their NCBs include members of scientific institutions and universities (up to 50 per cent of NCB members) and representatives of local stakeholders (up to two NCB members).

27. The working methods of the NCBs are reflected in most reports, including information on the frequency of their regular meetings (once a month, and when the need arises). The arrangements concerning the presidency of NCBs vary from a fixed chairperson (designated by the minister of the concerned ministry) to an annually rotating chairmanship among the ministries involved.

28. There is a general consensus on the need to improve national legislative and institutional frameworks and to integrate desertification issues into them. In most of the countries there is no specific legislation focusing only on desertification, since this is covered by general environmental laws (e.g. laws to protect water resources, soil or forests) or ministerial plans (rural development etc.).

29. As part of NAP preparation, all countries have integrated, or are in the process of integrating, desertification issues into existing laws, directives, ministerial orders and plans. NAP implementation implies both continuous updating of these laws and, in some cases, drafting and adoption of new laws. Three reports from countries preparing NAPs and one from a country implementing its NAP provide a detailed list and summary of revised and new laws. The reports of EU member countries also noted the important role played by EU directives in adding value to the NAPs (e.g. the EU Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC). Some countries report that official guidelines on good practice in agriculture or water use have been drawn up for local actors and national institutions. Two countries preparing their NAPs have set up new government institutions (such as general directorates of rural planning; hydrology or meteorological services).

30. Three countries reported the formal adoption of their NAPs during the last two years. They note that their NAPs have no specific national legal framework. One NAP is published as a Common Ministerial Decision, which gives instructions and recommendations to all concerned institutions and governmental agencies at the national and local level.

3. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements

31. Two main types of resources identified are: financial resources and human resources/capacity building, although most reports focus more on financial resources.

32. Countries stressed that at national level there were no independent budgets for the implementation of the Convention. Most financial resources come from the general budget of the ministries dealing with desertification (mainly ministries of the environment, of forestry or agriculture) or from

the budget of other ministries, local agencies and governmental organizations.

33. As far as external funding is concerned, three countries which are preparing NAPs indicate that their activities are mainly funded by international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Association for Energy Economics (IAEE). Most reports provide a detailed list of the projects and activities funded by these organizations. One country mentions the support and cooperation offered by other affected countries. The financial assistance granted by the European Commission is also highlighted by affected EU countries as essential support to activities in the forestry, agriculture and water resource management sectors in particular.

34. The need for funding is reported by most countries. Reports also outline difficulties experienced in mobilizing domestic funding to prepare and implement NAPs, owing to structural and political constraints. This slows the NAP implementation process, in particular activities relating to local capacity building, reforestation, and monitoring and assessment of desertification and drought. Two non-EU countries preparing a NAP underline the urgent need for external funding, as their governments can only provide inadequate or uncertain funding. Only one EU country reports a possible rise in funding from the responsible ministries to implement the NAP.

35. Efforts to mobilize local and national human resources are mentioned by all reports and are illustrated through various measures, such as local capacity-building seminars, training and exchange of scientific staff (on Geographic Information System (GIS), land use, etc.).

36. Domestic partnership agreements are common between universities, local agencies and NGOs, and between ministries concerned with the Convention, even if, in some cases, communication between them is reported as being difficult. Most reports draw attention to the intensive cooperation between the European Commission and EU members, and between the European Commission and the countries in accession. The following programmes are examples of such cooperation: Concerted Action to Support the Northern Mediterranean regional action programme to combat desertification (MEDRAP), Combating Desertification in Mediterranean Europe: Linking Science with Stakeholders (DESERTLINKS) and Policies for Land Use to Combat Desertification (MEDACTION). In addition partnership agreements have been formalized between five countries within the UNCCD Subregional Group of Annex IV countries. Finally, three countries mentioned cooperation with UNDP and UNEP in the general framework of the UNCCD.

4. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies

37. Most reports indicate that UNCCD issues are integrated into the various national development and environment plans (e.g. forest, agriculture, spatial planning, water resource development, socioeconomic plans).

38. Linkages and synergies between the UNCCD and other environmental conventions and Agenda 21 are indicated by most reports. Turning those linkages and synergies to account in this context depends on countries' capacities and their level of progress towards implementation. Some reports mention their initial activities to implement the UNFCCC and the CBD. Others refer to activities conducted under local Agendas 21. The Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC is also referred to in one report. Finally, another report makes reference to European conventions, such as the European Landscape Convention, and to several European plans, such as the Blue Plan.

5. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

39. The rehabilitation of degraded land is addressed by most reports, in particular through reforestation, but also rehabilitation of irrigation systems and terraces, and rehabilitation of salinized land. Scientific descriptions of local land degradation and soil erosion are also provided by some reports. Most countries (EU members and others) report a lack of funding to apply rehabilitation measures. As a consequence of this lack of funding, one report indicates a serious slowdown in the implementation of reforestation measures. Most of this information on rehabilitation is provided without any indication as to the methodology used.

40. Early warning systems on soil erosion and drought are reported by three countries to be at the further development stage.

6. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

41. Some reports include information on measures to monitor and assess drought and desertification, as for example: a new meteorological data and observation network for monitoring climatic effects such as drought; a network of monitoring stations for soil erosion control. Several countries have already established their own national databases of information on monitoring desertification and drought and they are also participating in the setting up of a Mediterranean database.

42. All countries report that continuity of monitoring and assessment of drought and/or desertification depends on the availability of financial resources in the future. Use of, and training in GIS systems and remote sensing are mentioned by most reports. Identification and mapping at different scales, of national sensitive areas have been undertaken by national institutions, based on various factors such as soil parameters, erosion risk, vegetation cover or general desertification risk. Such activities have also been conducted at regional level in cooperation with

other affected countries from the Northern Mediterranean. In several reports the sensitive areas are detailed and illustrated by maps and pictures.

43. Four countries give an update on the preparation and use of desertification impact indicators. Some of these countries also refer to implementation indicators. Several countries have followed suggestions made at the fourth and fifth sessions of the COP for incorporating more socioeconomic indicators into their desertification risk scenarios. Most countries are also continuing their work on benchmarks and indicators.

44. Scientific organizations and specialized governmental institutions (such as national environmental agencies or regional hydrographic surveys) are in charge of activities relating to monitoring and assessment, and the identification and evaluation of benchmarks and indicators.

7. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

45. At national and local levels, the conditions of access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how depend on the following factors: stage of implementation of the Convention, national scientific capacities and adequate financial resources. Several countries reported that they had identified and used traditional knowledge, such as traditional olive-tree growing techniques, protection of ancient terraces and rehabilitation of old irrigation systems.

46. Affected developed countries provided information on their scientific training programmes at national level and on their international technical cooperation on desertification. Some countries mentioned their participation in the Desertification Information System for the Mediterranean (DISMED) programme.

D. Lessons learned

1. Lessons from the national action programme formulation and implementation process

47. Countries implementing the Convention in the Northern Mediterranean are at different stages of the process, from starting preparation to implementing the NAP. Therefore, the lessons learned differ according to the stage reached. They relate mainly to communication among actors, the participatory process, evolution of the NCB and the funding approach. They can be summarized as follows:

(a) Communication and good will between all actors involved in preparing and implementing the NAP process are essential if it is not to slow down. This applies especially to the inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach at the administrative and political levels;

(b) Awareness-raising actions require immediate follow-up by political and administrative authorities. Otherwise, the result could be loss of interest by stakeholders in further involvement;

(c) Strengthening decentralized institutions is one way to ensure a real participatory process and the translation of national action to the local level. That would also facilitate the incorporation of local needs into the NAP process;

(d) The importance of early incorporation of desertification topics into school and university programmes in order to raise awareness and to build capacities, was also stressed;

(e) It was also stressed that the mandate and tasks of the NCBs need to be revised to bring them into line with the evolving NAP process. In addition, strong political support and commitment are required to enable NCBs to work more effectively;

(f) Countries which can mobilize their own funding, as well as countries that are mainly reliant on external funding, stressed that further implementation of the Convention (NAP implementation or issues relating to the Committee on Science and Technology (CST)) was facing a general lack of funding. In some cases, desertification is not perceived as a priority in the allocation of national budget.

2. Lessons from the reporting system

48. The main lesson to be drawn from the second reporting exercise is that the Help Guide should be brought into line with the decisions taken by the COP at its fifth session, to further facilitate the process for the country Parties. Account should be taken of the particular conditions of Northern Mediterranean countries, as defined in the regional implementation annex to the Convention (annex IV).

49. The format of the Help Guide could be readapted to the needs of the countries which have reached the implementation phase. In addition, the Help Guide should take into account the different forms of internal and external funding of Northern Mediterranean countries for implementing the Convention, so that they can provide the appropriate information.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

50. The most general conclusion that can be drawn from the eight reports received in this second reporting exercise, is that the UNCCD process has been gaining momentum throughout the Northern Mediterranean region. It is difficult to go beyond this assessment given the limited number of reporting countries and, in particular, the heterogeneity of their conditions. Furthermore, the present reporting format does not require the country Parties to emphasize analytical elements relating to this specific geographic area.

51. Judging from the reports received, many different types of activities are going on. Progress has been achieved, from the initial stage of the UNCCD process to the challenging phase of NAP implementation, which should increasingly influence land use planning. Each country goes at its own speed, taking into account various elements which all differ from one country

to another: socioeconomic context (EU members, countries in accession or in transition) and the particular institutional and legislative circumstances (old administrative framework or newly created governmental structures).

52. Despite large differences in the social, historical and political context of each country, the value of the participatory process is well recognized in all of them and its translation into action has been well adapted accordingly.

53. Northern Mediterranean countries present very heterogeneous economic conditions and capacities for channelling available and possible domestic and external funding for NAP preparation and implementation. This is apparent from the overview of information provided in the reports on the activities being launched.

54. The scientific involvement of Northern Mediterranean countries at national and regional level is strongly highlighted in this reporting process, as it was in the previous one. In Northern Mediterranean countries, desertification touches on a wide range of topics and concerns, which differ considerably from one country to another: from agriculture to drought; salinization to forest fires; loss of topsoil to deforestation, etc. Attention is also drawn to the role of the European Commission in the development of research and cooperation programmes on desertification.

55. This reporting process provides a good overview of the activities of the Northern Mediterranean countries relating to CST decisions, such as rehabilitation of degraded land; early warning systems for mitigating the effect of drought; drought and desertification monitoring and assessment; appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how.

II. SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Introduction

56. By the end of May 2002, fifteen of the 22 countries of Central and Eastern Europe had become Parties to the UNCCD. Other countries from the region are in the process of accession. National reports have been received from the following nine affected country Parties: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Republic of Moldova and Romania. Eight of them met the deadline set for submitting national reports (30 April 2002). Reports received after 22 May are not included in the synthesis.

57. The format and content of the reports were standardized in accordance with decisions 11/COP.1, 1/COP.5, 3/COP.5 and 10/COP.5, and with the updated Help Guide (ICCD/CRIC(1)/INF.5).

58. A synthesis of the information contained in the reports is presented in the following section. A compilation of the summaries appears in ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.2. The full reports may be consulted on the web site of the UNCCD secretariat, at http://www.unccd.int.

B. Overview of reports and emerging trends

59. Out of nine affected reporting country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe six ratified or acceded to the Convention in the late 1990s and three in 2000-2001. Accordingly, individual country Parties are at different stages of the UNCCD process. Three country Parties have already prepared their NAPs and three others are in the process of preparation. Four country Parties have submitted reports for the first time. For five Parties this is the second UNCCD reporting exercise and most of them did not confine themselves to updating, but prepared full reports. Five country Parties, namely ex-Soviet republics, are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, while four other country Parties have been pursuing policies aimed at rapprochement with, or joining the EU. All these factors make the task of formulating common emerging trends in the region rather difficult.

60. As far as common features of the affected country Parties of the region are concerned, the following two appear to be especially important in the UNCCD context. Firstly, most of them are affected not so much by large-scale desertification, as by land degradation, drought and deforestation. Hence, country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe are interested first and foremost in prevention of land degradation, rehabilitation of degraded arable land and pastures, reforestation, forecasting and mitigating the effects of drought. They deem the UNCCD to be an appropriate instrument to address these concerns.

61. Secondly, most of the country Parties of the region belong to the group of transitional economies and have been undergoing a complex and painful process of radical socioeconomic transformation that includes democratization, decentralization, privatization, land reforms etc. In some cases, the situation in these countries is aggravated by political disturbances. Most country Parties of the region have experienced serious economic difficulties typical of the transition period (decline in production, unemployment, budget deficits and inflation), although in the recent years some definite signs of economic stabilization and/or recovery have been noted.

62. In the absence of adequate external financing, persisting economic difficulties are forcing some country Parties to redistribute their limited budget resources to the detriment of environmental protection, including the UNCCD process, in favour of urgent social needs, in particular, poverty reduction.

63. As noted in the first reporting exercise, Parties' commitment to the Convention and their efforts towards its implementation have been especially visible in the institutional and legislative fields, in organization of awareness campaigns and in facilitation of the participatory process for NAP preparation. However, the next stages of the UNCCD process, i.e. NAP implementation, require considerably more financial resources. Progress appears to be less evident and depends mainly on the degree of external support.

64. Some country Parties have started paying more attention to relatively small projects, of a pilot nature, rather than to big ambitious ones. Among other new developments, one notes the growing importance of economic mechanisms to stimulate land protection and rehabilitation (taxes, fines, ecological insurance, special funds etc.) and the increasing role of local budgets in combating land degradation. Finally, a growing part of financing for environmental protection is coming in some country Parties from sectoral budgets, mainly agriculture, forestry, water and irrigation, and energy. Some transboundary projects aimed at preventing land degradation are considered in the region to be cost-effective.

65. During the period between the first and second reporting exercises the role of NGOs in the UNCCD process has also undergone certain changes in a number of country Parties of the region. Thus, cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies engaged in the UNCCD process is becoming more direct and business-like. NGOs are more often asked by relevant governmental bodies to perform specific tasks, such as researching public opinion and public awareness of land degradation and desertification.

66. In most country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe women are better represented in NCBs and NGOs engaged in the UNCCD process than was the case some years ago. At the same time, it should be noted that traditionally, the degree of emancipation and education of women in the region is relatively high and the gender issue is not perceived as a serious problem.

67. All reporting countries of the region are Parties to a number of other environmental conventions, particularly UNFCCC, CBD and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. In most cases, the NCBs for practically all the environmental conventions have been set up in the ministries in charge of environmental protection and natural resources. This facilitates coordination and the achievement of synergies.

68. The financial and technical assistance provided by international organizations and by bilateral partners is highly appreciated by the reporting country Parties of the region as a crucial factor for progress in the UNCCD process, taking into account their difficult economic situations. At the same time, it is generally understood that the next stage of implementing the Convention will require a substantial increase in external financial and technical support.

C. Synthesis of information contained in reports

1. Participatory process involving civil society, non-governmental and community-based organizations

69. All reports received from affected country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe confirm that in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, some specific policies and measures have been developed and implemented in order to stimulate the participatory process in combating land degradation and desertification.

70. Among such measures the reports mention organization at national and local level of seminars and workshops on land degradation and desertification, translation and distribution of UNCCD documents in local languages, preparation and free dissemination of locally adapted information materials, support to NGOs, awareness campaigns on the radio, on television and in the press.

71. Radical socioeconomic transformations, including democratization and decentralization, have, according to most reports, given considerable impetus to the participatory process. On the other hand, given the redistribution of rights and obligations at national and local levels in favour of the latter, it is essential that investments in education and training, down to the lowest level possible, i.e. to the final owner and/or user of a land parcel, are increased significantly. It is also stressed that decentralization and transition to the market economy should be supported by effective control systems at all levels in order to prevent over-exploitation of natural resources through ignorance or in the pursuit of profit.

72. Participating in the negotiations on, and becoming a Party to, the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters is considered by several country Parties a very important event. It opens new prospects for wider public involvement in the planning and implementation of countries' environmental policies, including policies to combat land degradation and desertification. It also generates synergies with other environmental conventions. For example, one country Party reported the setting up, after preliminary consultations with NGOs, of a public coordination council as a step towards improved coordination between the environment ministry and relevant NGOs.

73. Most country Parties noted that the role and activities of NGOs in environmental protection, including the UNCCD process, are continuing to grow and that cooperation between environmental NGOs and NCBs and other governmental bodies is improving further. The concrete forms of that cooperation are various and depend both on the specific situation and on the stage reached in the UNCCD process in each country. According to the reports by country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe, these forms may include: collecting information at local level, exploring public opinion, organizing meetings, involvement of women in the UNCCD process, particularly at local community level; organizing surveys on the natural, economic and social causes of desertification, and on degree of public awareness of environmental issues and the UNCCD process.

74. The key role of the mass media in popularizing UNCCD ideas was stressed in most reports, although one country Party noted that the scope of impact was limited by power failures in remote regions and the inability of locals to pay for relatively expensive newspapers. In more than one report the lack of financial resources was mentioned as one of the main reasons for limited utilization of modern electronic communication systems, particularly in remote regions.

2. Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements

75. According to all reports, the country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe recognize the need to include in their socioeconomic legislation specific legal and administrative provisions aimed at developing and implementing national programmes to protect the environment, including combating land degradation and desertification. gainst this background, the concrete measures already taken or planned within the UNCCD process, vary widely depending on the particular political and socioeconomic situation in the country, and on the period between accession to the Convention and submission of the national report. It should be noted that for the reporting country Parties of the region this period ranged from several years to several months.

76. According to the reports, the institutional and legislative frameworks established before the first reporting exercise have been reformed and/or revised in several country Parties. New governmental bodies have been established and new laws introduced.

77. Thus, in one country Party, a permanent state commission on the implementation of the UNCCD has been established, consisting of representatives of relevant agencies and academic institutions. The national environmental action programme, which *inter alia* addresses the problems of combating desertification, has been adopted.

78. In another reporting country Party a new ministry of ecology and natural resources has been established which serves as the NCB for the UNCCD and other environmental conventions; three new laws were adopted relating to the UNCCD process, namely, the Environment Protection Law, the Ecological Security Law and the Law on Soil Fertility Preservation.

79. One country Party also reports that during the period between the two reporting exercises the former NCB for the UNCCD was replaced by a new body within the ministry of ecology, construction and land development, which is in charge of all ecological conventions. A series of new ecological documents highly relevant to combating desertification and land degradation was approved.

80. The establishment of new institutions and elaboration of new environmental laws to replace or revise the ones which existed at the beginning of the transitional period, is also typical of other country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe.

81. Three country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe reported that within their general policy orientation towards rapprochement with the EU, they anticipate having to make certain changes to their ecological, legislative and institutional frameworks to make them compatible with EU standards and practices.

3. Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements

82. All reports from Central and Eastern Europe emphasize the decisive role of adequate financing for the successful launching, developing and implementing of action under the UNCCD. At the same time, all country Parties report that, owing to severe budgetary difficulties, they have had to allocate limited resources to meeting the population's immediate basic needs (food, energy, etc.) at the expense of some less urgent priorities, including combating land degradation and desertification. That happens mainly at the budget planning stage, although sometimes resources initially allocated to environmental protection are diverted for other purposes, such as social spending.

83. In some cases, budget financing is inadequate not only for the relatively expensive elements of the NAPs, but also for much smaller items, e.g. improving communication systems, translation, acquisition of technical literature, etc.

84. As an important new development several reports mentioned the growing interest in small pilot projects and in economic mechanisms and measures (fines for pollution, special funds, ecological taxes, ecological insurance, soft bank credits and subsidies for farmers). One relatively new country Party reported that setting up and implementing economic and financial mechanisms to stimulate rational use and conservation of land resources had been identified as a priority task under its future NAP.

85. Most country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe reported that external financing had been, and would continue to be, a crucial factor for progress in implementing the UNCCD, and for progress in the broader area of environmental protection which impacts on the UNCCD process. They urge development partners to increase their financial assistance to facilitate implementation of their NAPs. Some reports mention special priority projects and areas of cooperation where external financing is particularly needed. Those cooperation areas range from training of experts, awareness raising, supply of equipment for databases and information systems, to the implementation of concrete projects aiming at combating land degradation and desertification.

4. Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies

86. All reporting countries of Central and Eastern Europe are Parties to several environmental conventions. Most reports indicate that the UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD are very closely interlinked and that it is among those conventions that synergies should be sought in the first place.

87. As noted in a number of reports, institutional measures already taken by Parties to implement these conventions facilitate the coordination of activities in all three areas. Indeed, in most country Parties it is the environment ministries that have been appointed as the NCBs for all three conventions. Nevertheless, some country Parties consider that coordination

of work on these three conventions can be improved. Accordingly, in those country Parties, coordination of activities under the United Nations environmental conventions has been identified as a priority action under the NAPs in order to achieve increasing synergies.

88. One country Party points out that a number of environmental conventions could use the same indicators, e.g. climatic, pedological, hydric, agricultural, forestry, biological, demographic etc. All reporting country Parties emphasize the need to integrate action programmes on environmental conventions and national development strategies, in particular in such areas as poverty reduction, science and education, agriculture, forestry, energy and water supply.

89. Some country Parties report on specific projects which could serve as examples of efficient coordination to avoid duplication and to maximize synergies. Thus, in one country a project on self-assessment of national capacity needs addresses all three environmental conventions and attempts to develop principles of complex management of environmental protection. In another country, a project on the ecological rehabilitation of degraded peat lands should result not only in the rehabilitation of land but also in a decrease of greenhouse gas emissions, restoration of the fertile organic layer and conservation of biological and landscape diversity.

90. All reports recognize the particular importance of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

5. Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought

91. Some reports from Central and Eastern Europe contain fairly limited information on this subject, and some do not deal with it at all. One Party has approved a complex national programme of soil fertility improvement and established a database on soil quality. The main objective of its NAP is the preservation of soil fertility in areas affected by desertification by using ecological methods of soil utilization that are socially acceptable and economically feasible. Another objective of the NAP is protection of insignificantly degraded land and/or its conservation in order to achieve its natural rehabilitation.

92. Some country Parties point out that, to a considerable degree, rehabilitation of degraded land is taking place through sectoral policies, especially in such areas as forestry and irrigation. One country Party reports on a project for the reforestation of 7,000 ha of eroded soils and moving sands. This project is partly financed under the Kyoto Protocol with the Prototype Carbon Fund administered by the World Bank.

93. The country Parties have not provided any information on early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought. One country Party, however, mentioned the importance of drought forecasting in the preparation of integrated water resource use programmes. Another country Party noted that a number of actions taken so far by governmental and non-governmental

organizations to mitigate the adverse effects of drought had been, for the most part, sporadic and inadequately coordinated. Many of them have been reactive rather than preventive in nature. In the view of that country Party, action taken towards mitigating the effects of drought should shift from the crisis-management to the risk-management type.

6. Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment

94. Most country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe recognize in their reports the importance of drought and desertification monitoring, but provide rather sketchy information. One country Party lists various indicators which should be used for monitoring zones affected by desertification and drought, and for monitoring degraded soils affected by water erosion, land slides, wind erosion, salinization and pollution. In that country, the existing agricultural soil and forestry monitoring network may be used as a basis for monitoring desertification, drought and land degradation.

95. In the NAP of one country Party, elaboration of new methods of ecological monitoring is singled out as one of the priority areas for scientific and technical activities to combat desertification. Special attention is also being paid to the problems of ecological modelling, analysis and forecasting desertification processes.

96. In another reporting country Party the recently established National Monitoring Body of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources has begun setting up a unified system of monitoring the environment, including desertification.

7. Access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how

97. Most country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe report that they attach great importance to the scientific and technical support provided under the UNCCD process by various national institutions, such as academies of science, universities, and specialized scientific and research institutions. In one country national institutions are involved in scientific research on 34 different problems relevant to desertification. This research is financed mainly by the State, which also plays an important role in strengthening national scientific centres and procuring modern technologies.

98. Among various activities aimed at securing access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how, some Parties mention transfer of technology programmes; formulating plans for requests for technical cooperation; establishing high quality counselling service for land protection, irrigation techniques, utilization of fertilizers and for improvement of land productivity. Two reports emphasize the role of the traditional knowledge and working methods of local people in combating land degradation and desertification.

99. According to most reports, the major obstacle to access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how appears to be an acute or chronic shortage of financial resources.

D. Lessons learned

1. Lessons from the national action programme formulation and implementation process

100. It follows from all the reports from Central and Eastern Europe that even at the formulation stage, NAPs should become an integral part of a country's long-term socioeconomic strategies and overall national environmental protection and sustainable development programmes. Most country Parties of the region also consider it crucial to ensure interlinkage between the NAP and relevant sectoral programmes, particularly in such areas as agriculture, forestry, water and irrigation, and energy.

101. As regards the implementation process, it is rather difficult to draw lessons and conclusions since at present only three country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe have adopted their NAPs. Nevertheless, even the limited experience of three countries shows that the main obstacle to success is an acute or chronic shortage of financial resources, both at national level and on the part of foreign development partners. In the absence of adequate financing, most countries have started experimenting with smaller projects of a pilot nature. However, such projects cannot replace the large-scale activities envisaged by the NAPS, which require the conclusion of partnership agreements.

102. As noted by most reporting country Parties, there is a need, at the implementation stage, to secure efficient coordination of national activities on all main environmental conventions in order to avoid duplication and maximize synergies.

103. Another important lesson is the need to adjust previously established institutional and legislative frameworks in line with new trends in socioeconomic development and international cooperation in Europe.

2. Lessons from the reporting system

104. The main lesson to be drawn from the second reporting exercise is the need to further assist country Parties from Central and Eastern Europe, for example by bringing the Help Guide into line with decisions taken by the COP at its fifth session, taking into account the particular conditions of these countries, as defined in Annex V to the Convention.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

105. The most general conclusion which can be drawn from the reports is that the UNCCD process has been gaining momentum in the Central and Eastern European region. In spite of economic difficulties, most affected country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe have demonstrated growing interest in the UNCCD process. Indeed, the number of country Parties to the Convention

has increased from one in 1997 and six at the beginning of 2000 to fifteen at the end of May 2002. Judging from the reports received, progress has been achieved at the initial stage of the UNCCD process, particularly with regard to institutional and legislative frameworks, and public awareness raising.

106. The serious economic difficulties experienced by most country Parties of the region are limiting the resources which could be allocated to the protection of the environment, including combating land degradation and desertification. External financial and technical assistance appears to be below expectations. Therefore, at present, inadequacy of resources is the main obstacle to achieving further progress in the UNCCD process in Central and Eastern European affected countries.

107. One particular feature of the region is the special importance affected country Parties attach to UNCCD provisions to combat land degradation, protect top soil and mitigate the effects of drought, while desertification problems appear to be less acute.

108. There are some noteworthy new approaches reported by many country Parties of Central and Eastern Europe, such as the wider utilization of economic mechanisms, preparation and implementation of pilot projects, establishment of local funds and development of transboundary cooperation.

109. In most reports, the degree of compliance with the agreed structure for national reports was particularly low for science and technology issues. Not one report referred to the most recent decisions of the Committee on Science and Technology, and only one country Party mentioned the roster of independent experts.

III. SYNTHESIS AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REPORTS SUBMITTED BY OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

110. At the date of finalization of this document only one report had been received in this country category and therefore a synthesis is not called for.

Part Two

PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

I. PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Introduction and background

111. In accordance with decision 4/COP.3, the group of Annex IV countries submitted a regional report on their activities to the fourth session of the COP. This report, contained in ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(B), was reviewed by the Ad Hoc Working Group in April 2001, in Bonn, Germany.

112. The group of Annex IV countries is composed of the first five affected countries to have ratified the Convention. With no other affected country in the region being a Party to the Convention at the time of the group's creation in 1995, everything relating to the activities of this group has been called "regional".

113. The process of ratification and accession by Northern Mediterranean countries has been spread over the last six years and is still going on. Thus, the number of new Northern Mediterranean affected country Parties has steadily increased, from five in 1998 to ten in 2001. For this reason, the above-mentioned group of Annex IV countries, covering only five countries, decided in June 2001 to adopt a new designation in order to take account of this development in the Northern Mediterranean region. Therefore their activities are now designated "subregional" and no longer "regional": the group of Annex IV countries is to become a "subgroup of the annex IV" preparing a subregional action programme (SRAP).

B. Progress made in the subregional action programme

114. At the last reporting process, for the fourth session of the COP in 2000, the presidency of the above-mentioned group of Annex IV countries had presented a report highlighting the finalization and adoption of the terms of reference of their regional action programme. This report, contained in ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(B), also provided information on regional activities conducted since 1995 by successive group presidencies.

115. For the present reporting process, the new presidency has presented an update of the activities of the group since its last report. The full document is accessible on the UNCCD web site, http://www.unccd.int, under "Regional information". Based on that report, an outline of the main progress made is set out below.

116. On the occasion of its first meeting under the new presidency, in Athens, Greece, in June 2001, the group decided to change the designation of the "regional action programme" to "subregional action programme". A focal

point meeting of the subgroup of Annex IV countries was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on the occasion of the fifth session of the COP. No progress was reported in the implementation of the terms of reference of the SRAP. Members of the subgroup participated in various meetings of several scientific regional and interregional programmes and projects, such as MEDRAP (European Commission funding) and DISMED. They also presented a project for funding to the European Commission, the Clearing House Mechanism on Desertification for the Northern Mediterranean region (CLEMDES), which was approved.

II. PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

A. Introduction and background

117. Further to the request by some countries from Central and Eastern Europe, a new regional implementation annex to the UNCCD for Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V) was prepared and adopted by the fourth session of the COP, in 2000 (decision 7/COP.4). Annex V entered into force on 6 September 2001.

118. Annex V takes into account the particular conditions of the Central and Eastern European region, which apply in varying degrees to the affected countries of the region. They include specific problems and challenges relating to the current process of economic transition, the variety of forms of land degradation in the different ecosystems of the region, crisis conditions in agriculture, unsustainable exploitation of water resources leading to chemical pollution, salinization and exhaustion of aquifers, forest coverage losses, the use of unsustainable development practices in affected areas, and the risk of growing economic hardship and deteriorating social conditions in areas affected by land degradation, desertification and drought.

119. Annex V offers to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe concrete opportunities for strengthening scientific and technical cooperation, and for promoting the development, adaptation and transfer of relevant existing and new environmentally sound technologies within and outside the region. Such cooperation may be developed through the preparation and implementation of regional and/or joint action programmes.

B. Progress of regional cooperation

120. Since early 2000 the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been showing an interest in the UNCCD implementation process at national and regional levels. The consultative process on ways and means of initiating regional cooperation on combating land degradation in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of the UNCCD was started at the Workshop on Land Degradation/Desertification in Central and Eastern Europe, held in Brussels, Belgium, in May 2000, with financial assistance from the EU and the governments of Germany and Finland.

121. In order to give effect to the implementation of Annex V, and pursuant to the provisions of article 8 of the same Annex, the UNCCD secretariat facilitated the convening, in September 2001, in Prague, Czech Republic, of a consultative meeting to prepare implementation of the UNCCD in Central and Eastern Europe. Participants at the meeting emphasized the urgency of measures that need to be taken under the UNCCD, notably in the light of climate change and of the prolonged drought that was having severe consequences for many countries of the region. They requested the UNCCD secretariat, *inter alia*, to facilitate the establishment of partnership mechanisms for NAP implementation and to start the process of preparing a framework document for cooperation under Annex V.

Annex I

LIST OF COUNTRY PARTIES WHOSE REPORTS WERE INCLUDED
IN THE SYNTHESIS (27 May 2002)

Albania *
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus *
Bulgaria *
Cyprus *
Georgia
Greece
Hungary *
Israel
Italy (summary)
Malta *
Portugal
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Spain
Turkey

* new reports

Annex II

STATUS OF NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (27 May 2002)

1. Countries in the phase of NAP preparation

Albania
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Bulgaria
Cyprus
Georgia
Hungary
Israel
Malta
Spain
Turkey

2. Countries in the NAP implementation phase

Armenia
Greece
Italy
Republic of Moldova
Portugal
Romania

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